



President Kennedy and Sargent Shriver address media and Peace Corps volunteers, 1961

# From Idea to Implementation Standing Up the Civilian Response Corps

BY SAMUEL S. FARR

On October 14, 1960, President John F. Kennedy laid out his vision for the Peace Corps in a speech at the University of Michigan. Less than 5 months later, on March 1, 1961, the President signed an Executive order creating the Peace Corps. Using funds from mutual security appropriations, Peace Corps programs moved quickly through the design phase and into implementation. It was an example of how nimble government can be when political will is married with idealism and a willingness to improvise and take action.

**Congressman Samuel S. Farr has represented California's 17<sup>th</sup> Congressional District for 17 years. His district is home to the Naval Postgraduate School and the Defense Language Institute, which he supports from his seat on the House Appropriations Committee.**

On September 22, 1961, 11 months and 1 week after Kennedy's speech, the 87<sup>th</sup> Congress passed Public Law 87-293, formally authorizing the Peace Corps.

### A Tested Tool

I open with this history lesson because the Peace Corps did so much to define my life as a public servant, and I believe there are lessons to be learned that can be applied to reconstruction and stabilization efforts. But it is also a strong reminder of what the Federal Government can do when it sets its mind to a task, a lesson we must apply to our current foreign policy toolbox.

My experiences in the Peace Corps in Colombia remain some of my most vivid memories, and they have served to define how I have approached both domestic policy and foreign affairs during my time in Congress.

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It was my time living in a poor barrio in Medellin that taught me how to combat the culture of poverty, and those lessons linger today. I spent 2 years teaching Colombians to prioritize their needs and petition their government to fulfill them. I came to learn that change would only come to that poor country if the people were invested in the outcome.

Dollar for dollar, Peace Corps volunteers are the most effective diplomats that the United States sends abroad. We talk of winning hearts and minds, but Peace Corps volunteers live that mantra. I am not suggesting that we turn our foreign affairs over to the Peace Corps, but I

do suggest that we learn lessons both from its approach and from how the executive and legislative branches address its maintenance.

Within 5 years of the launch of the Peace Corps, some 15,000 volunteers were in the field, the most ever. Since then, the numbers of volunteers have dwindled as funding has declined. Only in the past year have we seen a renewal of interest, with a 1-year funding increase of \$60 million for 2010 bringing the total to \$400 million. For 2011, the House Appropriations Committee supported the administration's request for \$446.2 million. That would be an increase of 24 percent in 2 years.

Historically, the executive branch has taken the lead on the Peace Corps, but Congress asserted itself last year because the Nation was at a crossroads. We could either reanimate the Peace Corps, one of America's greatest global initiatives, or we could allow this tool to wither on the vine.

We are at a similar crossroads in our effort to build a civilian stabilization and reconstruction capability. The leadership displayed in reinvigorating the Peace Corps will have to be repeated if we are to successfully develop the recently authorized Civilian Response Corps (CRC), which is to failed and failing states what the Peace Corps is to local capacity-building. We must end the feuding between the Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) regarding lead for this civilian capability and establish a unified budget for stabilization work.

Back in the 1960s, my service in the Peace Corps was motivated by altruistic values. Now, nearly five decades later, it is clear that we must pair our enduring and generous values with the clear self-interest of helping other countries to develop competent, responsive governments that provide security, respect universal human

rights, and offer a chance for a better life to all their citizens.

American security and prosperity require effective government at home and abroad. For the readers of this journal, there is no need to belabor the point that our country needs a robust capacity to help weak and failing states and those beset by humanitarian emergencies. Alarming, our capabilities, while slightly improved in the period since my legislation passed 2 years ago, remain woefully inadequate for the tasks at hand.

### **A New Tool**

During my 17 years in Congress, I have worked tirelessly to enhance our government's capability to deal with failed and failing states. The work culminated in July 2008 when Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice officially unveiled the Civilian Response Corps, designed to help stabilize and rebuild parts of the world facing conflict and distress. Congress followed with official authorization in October 2008.

The creation of the CRC was modeled on my own legislation, the Reconstruction and Stabilization Civilian Management Act of 2008, which passed out of the House in March 2008. In that legislation (H.R. 1084), I laid out the creation of a Response Readiness Corps, including active and reserve components, which would later become the Civilian Response Corps.

During the process of drafting and improving that bill, I found that there is a great deal of support from both civilian and military stakeholders. While the bill was not created for current conflicts, the words General David Petraeus spoke in 2007 applied to my efforts to improve our civilian capacity: "There is no military solution to a problem like that in Iraq."

I have stated time and again that our Armed Forces are supremely capable of their mission, but that mission is not diplomacy or

development. We must have a strong counterpart to the military, and I believe that counterpart must be the Civilian Response Corps.

The CRC would be made up of 4,250 individuals, including 250 active members, a 2,000-member standby team, and a reserve component of an additional 2,000 volunteers from state and local governments. In short, the CRC must be a counterpart to the U.S. Armed Forces, capable of stabilizing countries in the transition from war to peace.

### **Funding History**

The CRC, led by the State Department's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS), does not have a long history. But much of that history involves leadership from the executive branch and reaction from Congress. It was the Bush administration that submitted the first-ever funding request to Congress for a "Civilian Stabilization Initiative (CSI)" budget line in the fiscal year (FY) 2009 budget request.

The President's request was \$248.6 million. However, when Congress ultimately appropriated funds for the CRC and S/CRS, it did so in the 2008 war supplemental. This \$55 million appropriation was to support the initial development of the Civilian Response Corps, and those funds were divided. The State Department's Diplomatic and Consular Affairs account received \$30 million, with the remaining \$25 million going to USAID's Bilateral Economic Assistance account. The "Civilian Stabilization Initiative" budget line was not included.

The first regular (nonsupplemental) CSI appropriation was \$75 million in FY09. It was again divided between State (\$45 million) and USAID (\$30 million). Following the same mold, FY10 CSI appropriation was \$150 million (\$120 million for State, \$30 million for USAID).

However, Congress rescinded \$70 million (\$40 million from State and \$30 million from USAID). The final appropriated funding level is now \$80 million (\$80 million for State, zero for USAID).

For FY11, the picture is even dimmer, with the Senate Appropriations Committee providing only \$50 million for the Civilian Stabilization Initiative. The House State

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and Foreign Operations Appropriation Subcommittee markup is somewhat better with \$85 million. However, when compared to the President's request of \$184 million, neither is fully supportive and the Senate cuts funding for this critical civilian capability by \$99 million, or 73 percent less than requested or required to maintain the capacity.

### Executive Inaction

Congress provided the administration with powerful new authorities and substantial resources to create and use the new Civilian Response Corps. I may support the current administration, but its accomplishments have been far below my expectations. By now, the administration should be much further along. The goal was to have the CRC close to fully established by now, including a 250-member active component, 2,000 standby component members, and a reserve component of 2,000 onboard and ready to deploy. Instead, the active component has barely reached 130 members, and only 967 members of the standby component

have been identified. Congress did not fund the reserve component in FY09 and FY10, and the administration did not ask for funding in FY11, so that component is at zero. Nearly all of the active and standby members lack full training and preparedness for deployment.

Furthermore, the interagency decision and management processes for use of the CRC, approved in 2007, should be operating like a finely tuned machine. This has not yet happened. From my vantage point, the shortfalls have emerged from two key issues: insufficient attention from top-level leaders in the administration, and endless bickering within and between the departments and agencies about roles, missions, and expenses.

Given the multiple necessary priorities in many domains of government, it is understandable that the administration has been operating at maximum bandwidth and giving higher priority to other issues. But second shrift will not do. If we are serious about creating these capabilities (and we must be), then the executive branch must find within itself much greater energy, cooperation, and vision.

At the time of this writing (summer 2010), the administration continues to be slow in sorting itself out as it relates to the various roles among diplomacy, development, and defense. Any day now, we are told, a new approach to streamline interagency decisionmaking for the Civilian Response Corps will be announced as part of the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review. We in Congress believe that we have had to wait too long. It is ironic that as we struggle to make only the smallest changes in our own systems and institutions, we are asking other countries to radically transform their governmental norms and structures. Even more frustrating is that we have already won the debate on a wide set of necessary reforms; we do not lack for good ideas.

The pattern of appropriations described illustrates that while Congress showed an inclination to fund the CRC, the follow-through on the executive side was insufficient to gain momentum in Congress. Furthermore, the divided budgets and the inability to fully meet the President's financial request demonstrate a lack of deep support to fund and build this new (and untested) response capability. The feedback loop of insufficient results in the executive branch leading to reduced support in Congress has been vicious. Only through sustained and focused attention from both branches will these capabilities be fully realized, and so far we have not seen either.

Let me return to the example of the Peace Corps. The simple adage "Where there is a will, there is a way" remains valid. Fifty years ago this October, Presidential candidate John F. Kennedy challenged students to give 2 years of their lives to improve America's image by going abroad to work with poor communities around the world. This impromptu exhortation ultimately set the stage for the Peace Corps, redefining U.S. global engagement and elevating American moral standing at the height of the Cold War.

The idea ignited the public imagination, and with unimaginable agility the executive branch rapidly initiated the programs around the world. Losing no time, President Kennedy ordered Sargent Shriver to do a feasibility study. Capitalizing on the momentum and Presidential leadership, Shriver later recalled, "We received more letters from people offering to work in or to volunteer for the Peace Corps, which did not then exist, than for all other existing agencies."

By the time Congress authorized the Peace Corps, volunteers were already in the field, changing the world and the American role in it. It is a powerful example we can learn from.

## Lessons Unlearned

The vast majority of my colleagues in Congress agree that failing states pose a threat to America's security and prosperity, and that our executive branch needs greater capabilities to prevent and respond to these situations. Moreover, the executive branch, starting in the second term of President George W. Bush and continuing under President Barack Obama, has espoused assertive policies regarding the need to enhance its capabilities. Nonetheless, in light of the baby-step accomplishments of the executive branch over the last few years and a general lack of cooperation with the legislative branch, interest among my colleagues to make the necessary investments and adjustments is painfully low. It is difficult to generate enthusiasm for policies that appear to be little more than great rhetoric with shallow follow-through.

As I have worked the aisles to generate support for the needed changes, most Members have responded that their constituents do not care about these issues or would simply prefer that they go away. If only I could wish away the problems of the world—but that is not reality.

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It is true that I have been able to be attentive to these issues because the people who sent me to Congress care about them. California's 17<sup>th</sup> District, surrounding the Monterey Peninsula and John Steinbeck's Salinas Valley, is not only one of the most beautiful places on earth, but it is also a globally minded area. The

region I represent is a focal point for higher education. We have the Naval Postgraduate School, a graduate-level institution for the Federal Government and its partners around the world; the Defense Language Institute, the premiere language institute in the world; and the state and private entities of the University of California–Santa Cruz, Monterey Institute of International Studies, and California State University at Monterey Bay.

All of us who see the perils of walking away from the troubled parts of the world must help more of our fellow citizens understand the interconnectedness of the modern era and how impossible it is for us to simply erect a wall along our borders and ignore the world. There is a lot of rhetoric about lobbyists and special interests controlling Congress; the truth is that constituent voices, even among all other distractions, are the most powerful. If constituents remain largely silent on our country's need for capacity, the few of us in Congress who are leading on this will only be able to seek out continued minor reforms. It will be impossible to achieve the necessary transformation. I urge every reader to express these concerns to their Federal legislators and to urge likeminded persons to do the same.

### **Next Steps: Legislative**

We need citizen support to get on with remodeling and strengthening our own government so it can help other governments be effective. When other governments are effective and responsive to their people, our country is safer. Specifically, the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress needs to:

- ❖ Make it more difficult for executive branch agencies to waste time squabbling among themselves about roles, missions, and funding issues. We can accomplish this by being more prescriptive in our legislation about these specific issues. If the law specifies exactly who is responsible for what and how it should be paid for, those issues will in many ways be settled and the presumed need to bicker will vanish. The agencies, indeed the executive branch as a whole, will continue to re-argue roles rather than developing real capability unless we in Congress write more directive laws. As has been stated by Ambassador James Dobbins, bureaucracies see no reason to invest in lasting capabilities if they expect or hope to dodge the responsibility in the future.<sup>1</sup> There are a variety of reasonable ways to consolidate and redistribute roles and missions. I tend to prefer the specific proposals under development in the House Committee on Foreign Affairs under the leadership of Congressman Howard Berman (D–CA).
- ❖ Restore funding to a level sufficient to support the ongoing growth and use of the Civilian Response Corps. Should the executive branch demonstrate good progress with these new capabilities, the funding level should be raised further to facilitate the recruitment, training, and deployment of the reserve component of the CRC.
- ❖ Provide funding as part of a consolidated or pooled fund, as Senator Richard Lugar has advocated.<sup>2</sup> A unified budget for stabilization work is fundamental to the type of unity of purpose that Congress expects from the executive branch in this vital operation. A unified budget would consolidate authority within the executive branch, helping cut through even more of the bureaucratic competition. It would also enhance Congress's ability to exercise oversight of the funding.

- ❖ Finally, and more controversially, Congress should form select committees to oversee civilian-military operations. The challenges of these operations extend well beyond our government's current shortfall in deployable civilian capability. Select committees would enhance our ability to cause effective integration among all the participants in these multifaceted operations.

### Next Steps: Executive

The executive branch has much to do as well. Presumably, in the period between the writing of this article and its publication, the administration will culminate and announce its long-overdue Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, which will serve to establish policy and proposals to, *inter alia*, streamline and improve development of the CRC and interagency coordination for its use. Whatever is proposed, it will need to be reviewed and authorizations revised by the new Congress as discussed above.

Among the most important decisions the President or Secretary of State must make is who should lead these processes going forward. To date, the nascent S/CRS has been led by highly devoted, highly competent career staff. I have always been an advocate for the career professional foreign policy and development experts in our government. Gradually, however, I have come to believe that only somebody with those technical skills and substantial political influence and connections to the senior leaders of the administration will be able to achieve the type of transformation and acceptance of change that I know is needed. The Peace Corps got off the ground because it was a good idea led by a competent visionary who was married to the President's

sister. I am fairly sure people listened carefully when he had an idea to share.

The highest priority for the new leader should be to prove the concept of the Civilian Response Corps by immediately recruiting, educating, and using the new tool. The active corps must be recruited to the maximum authorized number of 250. All the ancillary components necessary to support the effective use of the corps must be developed with haste. For example, the corps will be more effective if its activities are based on a keen appreciation of past lessons learned. Fielded teams need a well-developed reachback capability to harness expertise resident throughout the United States and the world. CRC members need to see themselves in a career path with growth opportunities and appropriate professional development over time. They need to be confident that there

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is adequate community support for their families while they are deployed in insecure areas. There must be opportunities for them to get extensive, real-world seasoning through apprenticeships with other organizations such as the United Nations (UN) field missions, or nongovernmental relief or development agencies. They need the best education and training possible for the complex and urgent situations they will be sent to support.

Indeed, the education and training of the CRC are critical. I have been pleased to provide the direct congressional support needed for the executive branch to create and test an innovative educational institute devoted to

providing the best possible learning activities for people going to work in conflict-affected regions. The Center for Stabilization and Reconstruction Studies (CSRS) is a practitioner-oriented teaching institute at the Naval Postgraduate School. Its purpose is to provide short learning programs for the full spectrum of actors who are involved in the broad set of activities related to peace and humanitarian operations.

If one were to visit post-earthquake Haiti, the African Union–UN hybrid peacekeeping operation in Sudan, or the war zone in Afghanistan, one would encounter an interesting mix of organizations working to help the host country and people. The mix would include armed forces from a variety of countries, government civilian officials such as our Peace Corps and their counterparts from around the world, civilian representatives of nongovernmental organizations (relief groups, development groups, and civil society groups), and representatives of intergovernmental organizations (the UN family of organizations, International Organization for Migration, and various regional organizations). These communities each face extremely difficult challenges in their respective areas of expertise.

By necessity among these communities, there is terrific diversity of organizational models, worldviews, technical capabilities, and scalability. Nonetheless, they all regularly work in the same space alongside each other. But until the creation of CSRS, they did not have a training institute devoted to improving their collective efforts. The center has specialized in and made a significant contribution to cross-community education for practitioners. When I attend the center's workshops, I am impressed by how well they use collective problem-solving and relationship-building to overcome stovepiping and other bureaucratic rigidities so as to enhance each participant's important future work.

Ask any past participant, whether military officers, relief workers, or governmental or international civil servants, and you hear similar stories. I look forward to the day when the Department of Defense supports its own policy and provides regular budgetary support to this remarkable outfit. Encouragingly, the State Department has begun to sponsor some courses through the center as part of the preparedness of the Civilian Response Corps.

I have used the Peace Corps throughout this article to illustrate strategies both practical and process-oriented. So I will close with words made famous in President Kennedy's inaugural address: "And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."

My sleeves are rolled up; I remain ready to champion these issues in the House of Representatives. And I am not much interested in tinkering at the margins. All of us who are involved must aim high and hit our targets. Great results will be the best proof of these concepts we have been struggling to demonstrate. The problems of the world are not waiting for us to get our act together. Our country needs these transformations. Let's get with it. **PRISM**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> James Dobbins, "Organizing for Victory," *PRISM* 1, no. 1 (December 2009), 58.

<sup>2</sup> Richard G. Lugar, "Stabilization and Reconstruction: A Long Beginning," *PRISM* 1, no. 1 (December 2009), 8.